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ABSTRACT

Noting that children's educational success is a high priority for California parents, voters, public officials, and business leaders, this report card documents how economic, health, and other conditions affect California children's learning and well-being. The report's introduction discusses factors influencing educational success, including high-quality preschool and access to health care. This section notes that there are important county, regional, and ethnic differences in academic achievement. An estimated 20 percent of California school-age children live in poor families. The introduction further notes that California continues to improve in the proportion of pregnant women receiving timely prenatal care and in the infant mortality rate. However, California children are more likely to lack health insurance than are children nationwide. Following the introduction, the report discusses adolescent well-being in the following areas: (1) education (achievement test results, high school completion, college preparation, school resources, students mastering English, and early education); (2) family economics (poverty rates, food programs, and housing); (3) health (health insurance, early health indicators, and teen pregnancy); and (4) safety (child abuse and neglect, foster care, and school safety). The final section of the report details recommendations in each area for state policy changes to improve children's overall well-being and school success as well as recommendations for community action. (KB)

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California Report Card, 2001: Factors for School Success

Jayleen Richards and Amy Dominguez-Arms

California NOW

November 2001

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Report Card 2001

Factors for School Success

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is a non-partisan, independent voice for America's children, working to translate the nation's commitment to children and families into action. Children Now's mission is to improve conditions for all children with particular attention to the needs of those who are poor or at risk. Recognized nationally for its policy expertise and up-to-date information on the status of children, Children Now has a distinguished record of achievement in promoting solutions to problems facing America's children. A hallmark of the organization is the broad partnerships its programs forge with parents, community leaders, lawmakers, businesses and the media. Children Now is a national organization with special depth in California.

Introduction

Overview

Children's educational success ranks high on the priority list of parents, voters, public officials and business leaders. This concern has engendered numerous initiatives to improve how children are taught in public schools. In the last decade, efforts to improve educational outcomes in California have included class size reduction in the early grades, further professional development for teachers, new statewide academic content standards, and student testing with public reporting and accountability measures.

While these and other school-based actions are obviously important in affecting children's achievement, factors both inside and outside the classroom significantly influence how well children will do in school. In fact, an extensive body of research suggests that given the close connection between learning and certain conditions, such as adequate nutrition, schools will not be able to accomplish all we want for all children unless such factors are addressed concurrently with other school improvement efforts.

Factors both **inside and outside** the classroom **shape** school success

This *California Report Card* and accompanying *County Data Book* document how economic, health and other conditions affect children's learning and how California children are doing, county by county, in terms of their economic security, health, safety and educational outcomes.

Factors Influencing Educational Success

High-quality preschool makes a difference

Certain characteristics of a child's life influence, though by no means determine, how well she will do in school. For example, research on the brain development of young children indicates that the quality of care a child experiences, from infancy through early childhood in particular, affects her capacity to learn later in life.[1] Thus, parents' and other caregivers' ability to nurture and respond to a child plays an important role in preparing the youngster to learn.

A high quality early care and education program can make a crucial difference in a child getting off to the right start in kindergarten. Such programs have been shown to improve children's cognitive and social development, and gains appear to be the greatest among children from disadvantaged backgrounds.[2] Studies show that children who attend a high-quality preschool are less likely to be held back a grade, be placed in special education or drop out of school than those children who do not have this experience.[3]

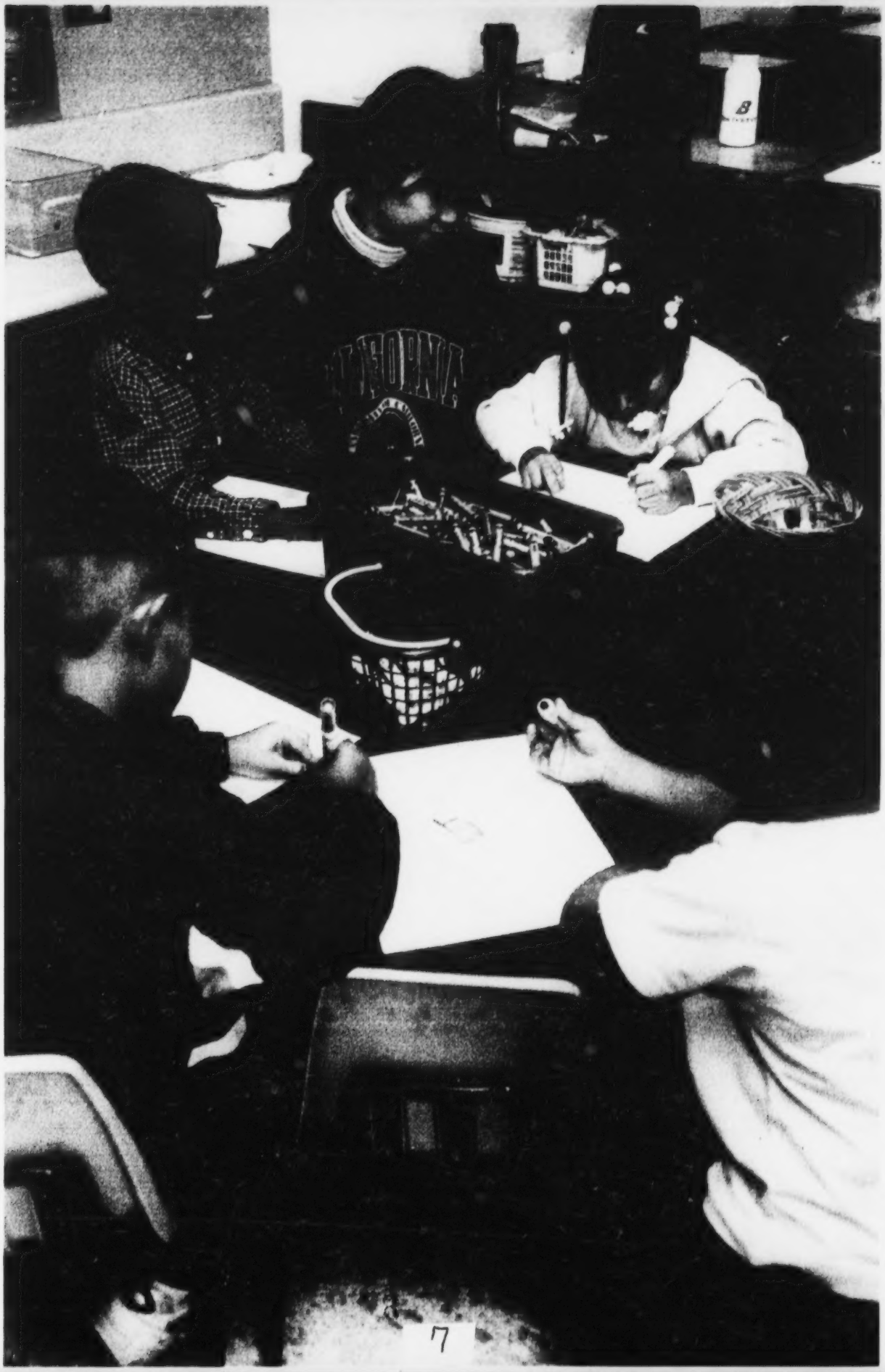
What Happened *Before* School Today?

Miguel gets out of bed and is greeted warmly by his father and mother. His family has the means to provide him with a nutritious breakfast and sufficient clothes to wear to school. Miguel's health care has left him without pain or worry and he walks to school feeling safe in his neighborhood. Miguel enters his classroom with much of what he needs to be able to concentrate on learning.

Unfortunately, far too many California kids do not start their day like Miguel:

- 1.7 million children live in families who are poor, even though two thirds of them have a working parent;
- 1.85 million children lack health insurance, increasing the chances that needed health care will be delayed or foregone;
- Over 660,000 children were reported abused or neglected last year.

All of these conditions can be alleviated through smart strategies made possible by public and private investments and community action. The Recommendations section, pages 31-38, suggests actions that are needed now.



A child who grows up in poverty faces significant challenges to his academic success. Studies have shown that when parents' income improves, their children stay in school and complete more education. Furthermore, even within the same family, children born when the family was poorer finished less schooling than their siblings born when the family had greater economic resources. For each year of childhood spent in poverty, children are two percentage points more likely to be in a grade level below their age.[4]

Access to health care is an important factor

Access to health care is another important factor in children's educational achievement. Uninsured children are three and one half times more likely than insured children to go without needed health care, including medical or surgical care, dental care, eyeglasses and mental health care.[5] Untreated health problems result in missed school days as well as diminished participation in the classroom.

A child's sense of safety in his home, neighborhood and school also influences his overall well-being and ability to concentrate in school. Abuse and/or neglect at home can diminish a child's physical and cognitive development.

When children's lives change, their capacity to learn can change as well. If a child who once went to school hungry gets a regular nourishing meal each morning, he will likely be more alert in class; if a child who can't see well receives eyeglasses, she will get more out of her lessons; if a child's stressful home situation is addressed, he may be able to concentrate better in school.

Differences Throughout the State

The accompanying *California County Data Book* analyzes how children are faring according to educational and other outcomes in the state's 58 counties. Important county and regional differences are noted as well as variances in outcomes among ethnic groups.

Differences in educational outcomes are found both across and within counties. We find that nearly every county has a substantial range of rankings among schools on the Academic Performance Index (API), which is based upon students' Standardized Testing and Reporting

(STAR) test scores. School resources also vary considerably, with urban areas tending to have more children per classroom and more teachers teaching outside of their field or with an emergency credential.

Living without secure economic resources is a common experience for children in California, with an estimated 47% of all school-age children living in families with low incomes (under 185% of the federal poverty level or $32,653 for a family of four) and about 20% of all children living in poor families (incomes under $17,650 for a family of four). Even in counties whose median income is significantly above the state average, substantial proportions of children live in poverty. In Orange and Ventura counties, for example, median incomes are above $53,000 (compared to the state median of about $42,500), yet 17% of children in those counties live in poverty.

In the area of health, California continues to improve in the proportion of pregnant women receiving timely prenatal care and the survival rate of infants past their first year of life. Yet children's health coverage—one of the most important determinants of a child's access to health care—is still not tracked at the county level. California children are significantly more likely to be uninsured than children nationwide (19% versus 14% in 1999).[5]

School performance in every county varies widely

Child abuse reports have declined from 78 reports per 1,000 children in 1996 to 68 reports per 1,000 children in 2000. Foster care rates have remained quite constant, with 10.5 per 1,000 children (over 102,000 total) in foster care. The range of foster care rates among ranked counties stretches from 18 per 1,000 children in Mendocino (and 17.5 per 1,000 in Sacramento and Yuba) to 3.2 per 1,000 children in Marin.

Making Progress

The data illustrate that every county could improve children's chances for success in school through initiatives both within the school system and through efforts that improve children's lives in other ways. The Recommendations section suggests actions that could be embarked on today to foster children's educational success and overall well-being.

Test Scores

Measuring children's achievement is a complex endeavor. The state of California has sought to improve the connection between its standardized tests and a set of common goals for what children should be learning. In recent years, the state adopted content standards describing what children should learn at each grade level in English/Language Arts, Mathematics, History/Social Science and Science. A portion of the STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting) test is intended to measure children's knowledge of the recommended curriculum. While standardized tests provide only a partial picture of what children know and can do, the results can be helpful in guiding school improvement efforts.

Widest school performance gaps in Bay Area, Fresno and Los Angeles

Nearly every county experiences a significant range among its schools on the Academic Performance Index (API), which is based upon students' Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test scores. The widest gaps between the lowest and highest performing schools are found in Bay Area counties, Fresno and Los Angeles. Los Angeles County had the schools with both the lowest and highest statewide scores: 315 and 969 out of 1,000—a gap of 654. In the Bay Area, the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa and San Francisco each experienced score gaps between their highest and lowest scoring schools of 579 or greater.

High and Low API Scores, By County

COUNTY	LOW	HIGH
Alameda	351	948
Contra Costa	346	941
Fresno	346	948
Los Angeles	315	969
San Francisco	354	933

Explaining the differences in scores cannot be done conclusively. However, a review of research in this area yields some common findings. For one, a family's socioeconomic status seems to have a significant impact on a child's school achievement.[1] Other factors that influence achievement are the teacher's preparation (i.e. credentialed or not), teacher experience and class size.[2] Various researchers have found that improving resources available to schoolchildren, such as adding teachers to decrease class size or hiring more teachers with credentials, has the greatest beneficial impact on low-income and minority students.[3] So, while infusing more resources into all classrooms can be helpful, the largest benefits may be achieved when they are targeted to disadvantaged students.

The characteristics of the two schools scoring highest and lowest in Contra Costa County starkly illustrate the differences in our state's classrooms, not only in terms of students' backgrounds, but also school resources.

Verde Elementary in the city of Richmond had the county's lowest API score (346) in the year 2000. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of students at Verde qualify for free/reduced price lunch. About half (48%) of the children's parents did not complete high school and another 46% ended their formal education with a high school degree; none completed college. The student body is African American, Latino and Asian; no white students attend the school. For kids in grades 4-6, classes have 30 students on average. One out of four of their teachers is not fully credentialed.

Camino Pablo Elementary in the city of Moraga had the county's highest API score of 941 in the same year. Not one of Camino Pablo's students qualifies for free/reduced price lunch. Ninety percent (90%) of the children's parents completed college, with 30% attaining higher degrees, and

High School Completion and College Preparation

California Department of Education (CDE) data indicate that the proportion of students dropping out of high school continues to decline across all ethnic groups.* However, the gaps between white students and Latino or African American students have not diminished. Among the ten counties with the largest Latino and African American child populations, the county that made the greatest improvement in decreasing the white-Latino gap was Santa Clara, with the rate for white students declining from 1.7% to 1.0% and the rate for Latino students declining from 5.5% to 3.8%. The county that made the greatest improvement in decreasing the white-African American gap was Contra Costa, with the rate for white students decreasing from 1.4% to 0.9% and the rate for African American students decreasing from 4.8% to 3.2%.

Resources may benefit disadvantaged students most

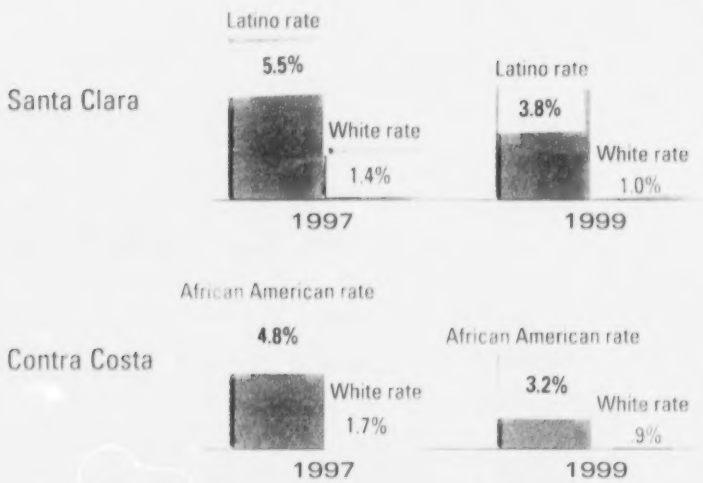
* Due to discrepancies in CDE data regarding dropout rates and high school completion rates, questions have been raised about the data's accuracy; CDE hopes to obtain better estimates in the future through a new tracking system.

all are at least high school graduates. The student body is 87% white. The average class size in grades 4-6 is 26 students. One hundred percent of the school's teachers are fully credentialed.

Student Characteristics and School Resources	Verde	Camino Pablo
Fully Credentialed Teachers	75%	100%
Class Sizes in Grades 4-6	30	26
Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Price Lunch	97%	0%
Parents with a College Degree	0%	90%

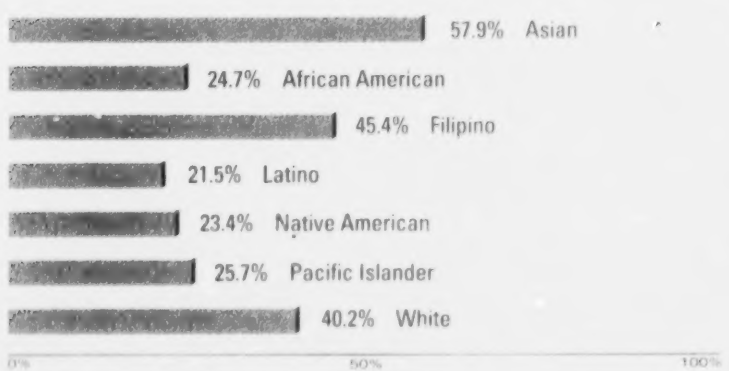
Not all scoring differences can be explained by student characteristics nor by school resources, but as described further in this report, strong correlations do exist.

Diminishing Dropout Gap



Differences persist between the proportion of white students who have taken the coursework necessary to enter a four-year college and the proportion of Latino and African American students who have done so. Data on Asian students show higher rates of preparation overall, though important differences exist among Asian sub-groups. Overall, California's rate of high school graduates entering a four-year college (50.5%) is considerably lower than the national average of 62.9% high school graduates entering a four-year college.

Ready for College 1999



Among the ten counties with the largest Latino or African American populations, the county with the greatest improvement in its African American college-preparedness rate was Santa Clara. The county with the greatest improvement in its Latino college-preparedness rate was Fresno.

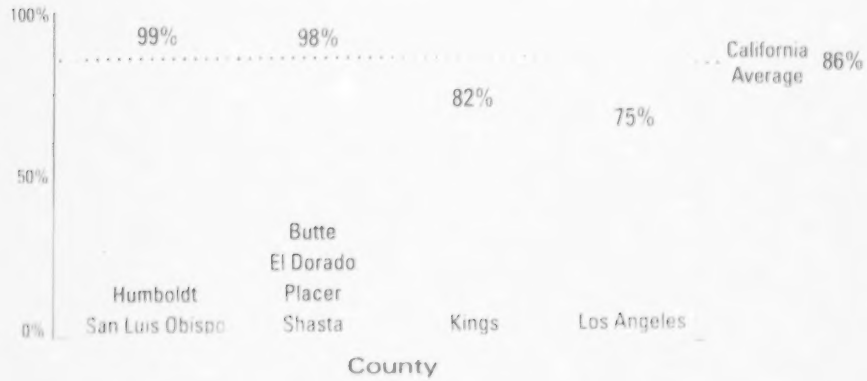
School funding across districts is more equal today than it was in the years previous to the 1971 *Serrano vs. Priest* court decision, which held that the existing school finance system based on property taxes was inequitable and unconstitutional. Since that time, various ballot initiatives and legislative measures have also sought to equalize funding among districts. However, the school resources available to children continue to vary by county, school district and individual school because of differences in categorical funding, private donations and other factors, such as a district's ability to attract and keep experienced

Teachers without full credential:
Los Angeles 25%
San Diego 5%

teachers. In addition, some education experts note that even equal revenues dedicated to children of different socioeconomic backgrounds may still leave disadvantaged children with compromised educational opportunities since they may need greater assistance.

The percentage of teachers in the classroom without a full credential varies considerably by county. The highest proportion occurs in Los Angeles County, where 25% of teachers are not fully credentialed. The urban counties tend to have higher proportions of teachers without full credentials, while the rural counties are more likely to have nearly all of their teachers fully credentialed. One notable exception is the urban San Diego County, where 95% of teachers have their full credential.

Percentage of Teachers With Full Credential

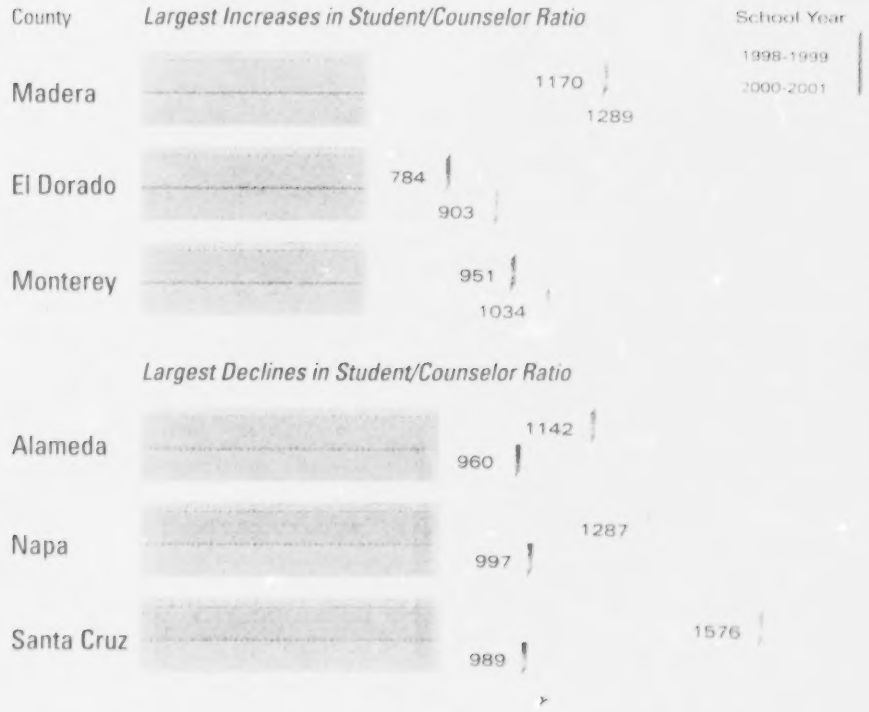


The average number of students per teacher in grades K-3 is no more than 20 children in every county. Clearly the state funding dedicated to reducing class sizes in the early grades, begun in 1996, has led to these results. In grades 4-6, however, significant variation is observed, with average class sizes of up to 30 students in the counties of Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Solano and Ventura. In Los Angeles County, where 28% of the state's students attend school, the average class size for grades 4-6 is 29 students.

Student counselors are scarce in schools statewide. On average, 945 students share one counselor. In the counties of Contra Costa and Orange, one counselor works with an average of 1,321 and 1,571 students, respectively.

Student/Counselor Ratio, Increases and Declines

Among the 37 Counties with More Than 15,000 Students



One counselor for 945 students

The San Antonio Village Collaborative is a multi-racial neighborhood alliance committed to transforming San Antonio neighborhood schools in Oakland into vibrant community-serving "village centers." Village Centers host a wide range of after school learning programs; offer direct access to physical health, mental health and social services; and facilitate the development of grassroots leaders and organizations among parents and youth to advocate for positive changes in schools and neighborhoods. Initiated by the San Antonio Community Development Corporation in 1997, the Collaborative came into being to address growing neighborhood concerns about youth violence, crime and truancy. After a one-year community planning process, the Collaborative opened its first "village center" at Roosevelt Middle School. Since 1998, the Roosevelt Village Center has offered after school programs that engage nearly 1,000 youth each year; established a school-based health center that handles 5,000 patient visits each year; and has organized over 100 parents who are active members of the Roosevelt Parent Leadership Council. With the support of the Collaborative, over 200 parents successfully won a campaign to have the City of Oakland and the Oakland Unified School District improve safety conditions at Roosevelt Middle School, including the installation of new lights, new fences and the hiring of a new campus security monitor and new custodian.

Students Mastering English

Learning English is critical to children's ability to participate fully in our educational system. At the same time, children who grow up speaking more than one language have a valuable skill for our global economy. One quarter of California's children are learning English as a second language and many additional children already are bilingual. For the one quarter of students classified as "English learners" in school, an expeditious transition to becoming English proficient speeds their access to all educational resources available.

Schools track how many children each year are re-classified from "English learners" to "English proficient." Among the 23 counties with at least 10,000 English learners, Kern and Sonoma had the highest rates of students re-classified to English proficient in 1999-00, with over 10% of their English learners re-designated as English proficient during that school year. Los Angeles County, with over 574,000 English learners, had a re-designation rate of 9.1%, above the state average of 7.8%.

Early Education

A high-quality early childhood program helps set the stage for the successful beginning of a child's education in kindergarten and beyond. Unfortunately, such programs are out of reach for many preschool-age children because of the uneven supply statewide. A recent examination by Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) of the child care supply and demand in Los Angeles County found that, although 17% of child care centers reported vacancies, over half (52%) reported waiting lists. The highest demand was for pre-school slots and among centers with such waiting lists, an average of 34 children were waiting for a pre-school slot.[10] Program quality is also of concern; another PACE study found that one in six sampled centers statewide failed to meet recommended quality benchmarks in terms of class size and staffing ratios.[11]

Preschool programs: uneven supply statewide

The average cost for a full-time slot at an early care and education center for a preschooler is $430 monthly or 12% of the median income for California families. Head Start, a free preschool program for poor three- and four-year-olds, is funded to serve just 28% of the California children who qualify.

01 18

Education

The Fairplex Child Development Center is a private non-profit center co-sponsored by the Los Angeles County Fair Association and the University of La Verne. One hundred and fifty children from eight weeks to six years of age participate in specially-designed infant, toddler and preschool classrooms. The L.A. County Fair Association provides administrative, facility and technical support as a part of its commitment to building community through outreach and educational programs. With the guidance of the faculty of the Child Development Department of the University of La Verne, the center is able to implement the latest approaches in early education. Based on a commitment to provide "Continuity of Care," the center keeps groups of children together with familiar teachers for an extended period of time, up to three years. This approach helps meet the emotional needs of the children for familiarity, stability and consistency. Fairplex places special emphasis on engaging parents in educational events, including exposing them to kindergarten and the expectations their children will find there. Other seminars address issues such as positive discipline, reading readiness and literacy. Fairplex staff can enroll in courses at University of La Verne at no cost, which has enabled some employees to receive Bachelors or Masters degrees in Child Development, ultimately improving their skills and their compensation.

Holmes
Blizzard
20
20

Poverty

A child whose family income drops below the poverty level faces significant hurdles to success in school. Poverty affects children in myriad ways; a very low income can compromise a child's access to adequate nutrition, lead-free housing, good child care and other important basics for a child's healthy development. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to score lower on standardized tests, be retained a grade and eventually drop out of school.

Longer **time in poverty** means **greater impact** on school success

Poverty during a child's early years has an especially significant impact on a child's academic outcomes. Children who experience poverty during their preschool and early school years have lower rates of school completion than those who experience poverty only in later years.[17] The detrimental effects of poverty vary according to its length and severity as well. Studies have found that children who experience long-term poverty score significantly lower in school assessments than those who experience short-term poverty. Children with family incomes below half of the poverty threshold also do worse than those with incomes just at the poverty level.[17]

Due in part to the economic boom that California experienced during the mid to late 1990's, the state's child poverty rate decreased from 24.5% in 1995 to 19.5% in 2000. California children remained much

Poverty Under Age 18, 1997

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more likely to live in poverty than kids nationwide, however; the national child poverty rate was 16.2% in 2000. The Central Valley counties continue to have some of the highest child poverty rates, with six of the eight Central Valley counties among the 15 counties with the largest proportions of children in poverty.

Food Programs

Researchers confirm that food insufficiency has a negative impact on a child's academic outcomes. Older students who experienced food insufficiency are more likely to have repeated a grade and missed more days of school.[11] Over 2.1 million low-income California school-age children were served free and reduced-price school lunches in 2000 (representing 35% of all schoolchildren); however, less than 40% of children receiving free and reduced-price school lunches also received a subsidized school breakfast and just 39% received meals during the summer through the Summer Food Service Program and National School Lunch Program combined.[12]

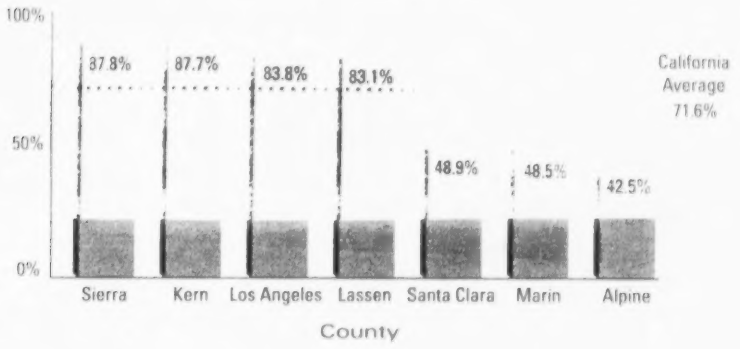
Fewer than 40% of eligible children get school breakfasts

Food for People operates a Summer Food Program for children and teens under age 19 throughout Humboldt County. The program's purpose is to provide food for children who participate in the free and reduced school lunch program during the school year, whose parents lack the resources to provide the extra meals over the summer. By partnering with summer recreation programs, local cities' community resource departments, Healthy Start programs, the local transit authority and senior resource center, Food for People is able to distribute lunches five days a week at 14 sites throughout the rural county. This would not be possible without the support of volunteer parents and community members at each of the sites. Many of the children served are certified as eligible simply because they live in a neighborhood where more than 50% of the local school's population is eligible for the federally funded lunch program. In 2000, the Summer Food Program provided more than 10,500 lunches over a nine-week period. In addition to the summer program, Food for People actively participates in the Food Stamp Access Task Force, which is promoting easier access to the food stamp program by helping families complete a simplified, initial application form at the food bank and other food pantries across the county. This service eliminates one of two required visits to the Department of Social Services that, for some county residents, is more than one hour's drive from their home, with no public transportation available.

Fifty-five percent of Californians eligible for Food Stamps do not use this benefit.[16] Under-utilization is due in part to the misperception that working people do not qualify for the program, even though a majority of Californians eligible for Food Stamps are working. Food Stamps provide important benefits to children; however, data are not available at the county level to measure how many eligible children access this food assistance.

The Women, Infants, and Children Supplemental Nutrition program (WIC) served 928,104 infants and children from birth to age four in 1999. WIC provides nutritious food, counseling and health care referrals to families. Nearly 72% of eligible children are being served; the counties of Kern, Lassen, Los Angeles and Sierra serve more than 83% of eligible children. WIC's high participation rate is due in large part to its streamlined application process that does not require cumbersome documentation and its effective outreach activities.

Percentage of Eligible Children and Infants Receiving WIC 1999 *



** California Department of Health Services, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program Wire Unit), data not published website: www.wicworks.ca.gov*

New Opportunity to Increase School Meals Participation and Reduce Schools' Administrative Burdens

The National School Lunch Program now allows schools with high numbers of low-income children the option of offering all students free meals regardless of the income of any individual child. This option saves schools money by reducing administrative tasks, eliminating students' annual applications and the daily student count by income category at each mealtime. Furthermore, this policy speeds up the meal line and helps eliminate the stigma associated with the program since all children can receive the meals.

Housing

Studies show that students who move frequently are more likely to have lower test scores, miss more days of school and have behavioral problems.[1] Housing is one of the largest costs in a family budget and many California families struggle to find quality, affordable housing. Low-income families have not fared well in recent years during the nation's economic boom. Affordable housing has diminished and the income of low-wage families has not been able to keep up with the rising cost of rents, forcing some families to relocate.

A full-time minimum wage earner ($6.25/hour or $12,500/year) renting in California would pay more than the recommended 30 percent towards rent for an average two-bedroom apartment in all 58 counties.[2] In two-thirds of the counties (66%), minimum wage earners would have to pay over half of their income towards rent and in five counties such an apartment would cost more than one's total income.

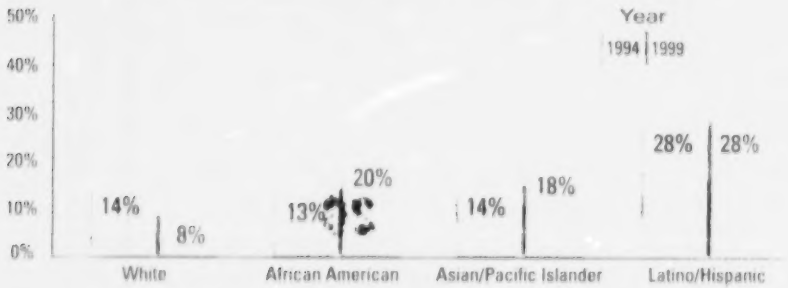
Health Access

In California, one out of every five children (1.85 million) is uninsured. About 1.3 million uninsured children are eligible for, but not yet enrolled in, the state health coverage programs Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. Uninsured children are more likely to go without regular preventive care that could identify vision and hearing problems and help to manage health problems such as asthma.[18] Left untreated, such health problems prevent a child from performing well in school and increase absenteeism.

Health coverage can help school achievement

The number of uninsured children is not available at the county level. Statewide, nine out of ten (89%) uninsured children are in working families. Latino children are three and half times as likely as white children to be uninsured (28% compared to 8%) and Asian/Pacific Islander and African-American children are more than twice as likely as white children to lack health insurance (18% and 20% compared to 8%). The uninsured rate for white children from 1994 to 1999 was cut 43%, from 14% to 8%, while the uninsured rate for other ethnic groups remained the same or increased.[19]

Children without Health Insurance (by Race) 1994 vs. 1999



Brown, E. Richard, The State of Health Insurance in California: Recent Trends and Future Prospects, March 2001

Early Health Indicators

Prenatal care helps and rates **improve** in 17 counties

Early comprehensive prenatal care can promote a healthier pregnancy and can reduce the risk of certain adverse birth outcomes by detecting and managing medical conditions, providing healthy pregnancy advice and offering a gateway into the health care system for low-income women.[9] In California in 1999, more women sought prenatal care in their first trimester compared to the preceding two years. Among 52 ranked counties, prenatal care rates improved in 17 of them during the period from 1997 to 1999.

Prenatal Care in First Trimester Improves 1997-1999

GROUP	1997	1998	1999
All	81.8%	82.4%	83.6%
African American	78.6%	79.5%	81.1%
Asian American	84.2%	84.9%	85.7%
Latino	77.3%	78.1%	79.7%
Native American	70.9%	72.1%	72.5%
White	87.9%	88.2%	89.1%

Clinicas de Salud conducts outreach in Imperial and Riverside Counties to children and families who are eligible for California's Healthy Families and Medi-Cal programs. Since June 1998, outreach workers have been distributing information about the programs and assisting parents in completing mail-in application forms in both English and Spanish at seven clinic sites in Winterhaven, Calexico, El Centro, Brawley, Niland, Mecca and Blythe. In addition to the clinic-based outreach, Clinicas de Salud utilizes a "promotora" outreach model, through which outreach workers go directly to families at their homes, on labor buses and at other community gathering places at all hours of the day and night to encourage parents to enroll. Other outreach activities range from health fairs to events held at city parks and pools and from presentations at preschool parent meetings to food giveaways. They have been especially successful in reaching families through local preschools and flyers sent home from schools in parent packets. In 2000, Clinicas de Salud successfully enrolled 1,499 children in Healthy Families and 1,302 children and adults in Medi-Cal. With the help of the Department of Social Services, staff is able to identify recent applications that have been denied for lack of documentation and then follow up with those families to help them complete the process.

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Infants born at a low birth weight (under 5 pounds, 8 ounces) are more likely to experience developmental delays. Studies show that low birthweight children, once they enter school, have higher rates of special education assistance and are more likely to repeat a grade.[7] The rate of low birthweight infants improved in 15 of 45 ranked counties over the last three years for which we have data (1997-99); however, African American infants still are nearly twice as likely to be born at a low birth weight compared to their counterparts.

Teen Pregnancy

Over the last decade, the rate of teen births in California has progressively decreased, from 75 births per 1,000 female teens ages 15 – 19 in 1991 to 50 births per 1,000 female teens in 1999. Nonetheless, 56,577 California teens gave birth in 1999, decreasing the likelihood that these young women will finish high school and compromising the economic stability of their children's lives. Thus, even with the promising trend of declining teen births, it is important to continue outreach and education efforts about the impact of early parenthood.

Complete the Picture: The Necessity for More Specific Ethnic Data

California is home to large populations of children from different ethnic backgrounds. Forty-three percent (43%) of California's children are Latino, 38% are white, 12% are Asian/Pacific Islander and 7% are African American. Further diversity exists within the major ethnic groupings. For example, California's Asian/Pacific Islander community is 27% Chinese, 25% Filipino, 12% Vietnamese, 9% Asian Indian, plus other sub-groups.

Often the data for the major ethnic groups mask important differences within each group. For example, while the state average for births among Asian/Pacific Islander teens was 56 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19 from 1989-1998, it was 190 per 1,000 for Laotian teens and 173 per 1,000 for Guamanian teens. In contrast, the teen birth rate was 8, 13 and 19 per 1,000 for Chinese, Korean and Japanese teens, respectively.

At the state and local levels, policymakers should examine where more specific data collection could better inform policymaking by fostering more targeted analyses of policies and programs.

Cynthia Harper and Tracy Weitz, *Data Analysis of Births in California, 1989-1998* (San Francisco, CA: UCSF Center For Reproductive Health Research & Policy, 2001– forthcoming).

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Child Abuse and Neglect

The detrimental effect on a child's education is just one part of the negative impact child abuse and neglect has on a child's life. In 2000, there were over 660,000 reports of child abuse and neglect. Among ranked counties, those experiencing the largest increases in rates of child abuse reports include Glenn, Tehama and Inyo. The greatest declines occurred in Lassen, Solano and Yuba.*

Child Abuse Rates 1999-2000

(Rate per 1,000 children)

* Changes in the number of child abuse reports may reflect increase incidence of child abuse and/or greater awareness about reporting.

Foster Care

Placement in foster care reflects disruption in a child's home life (either occurring before or after such placement, or both) that can affect his ability to focus on schoolwork. Foster care placements decreased slightly from 1999 to 2000, declining from 106,000 to 102,000 children in foster care. California has a higher proportion of children in foster care compared to the average state; one in six children in foster care nationwide lives in California.

During the 2001 legislative session, a group of California lawmakers made a concerted effort to improve conditions for children in foster care and their future prospects once they reach age 18. Measures were introduced to increase reimbursement rates to foster family homes, help foster families with child care costs and reduce the number of children's cases that child welfare workers manage. Foster care rate increases were not included in the state's 2001-02 budget; many of the other measures are still under consideration.

School Safety

While incidents of school violence garner much media attention, children nationwide are about twice as likely to be victims of violent crime *away* from school than at school. Yet, even if schools provide a relatively safe environment, any level of violence or other disruptive behavior compromises the learning environment for children. In California during the 1999-2000 school year, about three violent incidents occurred for every 1,000 students, up from about two incidents per 1,000 students in 1995-96. There was a decrease in reports of property crimes, from four per 1,000 in 1995-96 to three per 1,000 in 1999-00.[32]

After school programs can be **safe havens** for youth and **improve learning**

Many children and parents have greater concerns about youth safety in the after school hours than during the school day. Children are most likely to become victims of violent crime during the hours of 3 pm to 6 pm.[33] This time poses other risks as well. Students who spend no time in extracurricular activities are 49 percent more likely to use drugs and 37 percent more likely to become teen parents than students who spend one to four hours per week in such activities.[34] One study found

that eighth-graders who were unsupervised for eleven or more hours per week were twice as likely to abuse drugs or alcohol as those under adult supervision.[25]

An after school program can provide a safe haven for children as well as an opportunity to participate in enriching academic, sports, arts and other activities. However, far too many children lack access to a high quality after school program due to few affordable options. Statewide, we estimate that a subsidized after school program is available to fewer than half of all five- to fourteen-year-olds who could benefit from one.[26]

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Fresno County (B&GC) serve 12,000 youth in year-round programs at 15 club sites. Their mission is "to inspire and enable all youth, especially those from disadvantaged circumstances, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens." The organization has had great success in reaching youth with an after school program based on a prevention curriculum that addresses early sexual activity and drug and alcohol abuse. Their key to success: engaging young people in fun activities as a means to drawing them into a positive environment with their peers and caring adults. For many youth who haven't participated in organized activities before, it is often the adventure trips and outings that first bring them in. On trips to a local ropes course or the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, the teenagers have time to bond with new friends and build relationships with the Clubs' staff. As a result, many of them come back to participate in job training courses, recreation programs, leadership training and peer support groups such as Passport to Manhood and Girl Talk. In response to an extensive Youth Outcomes Measurement Survey, 93% of members stated having better attitudes toward education, homework completion and continued education after participating in B&GC programming.

Recommendations

Report Card 2001 illustrates how key factors affect a child's readiness for or ability to learn in school. California's success in improving school outcomes hinges upon our undertaking a complementary focus on children's overall well-being. The first set of recommendations below concentrate on state policy changes that contribute to this goal. Yet, as a community member, parent and/or voter, every person can make a difference in the lives of children and their capacity to get the most out of their education; see page 38 for community action recommendations.

Early Care and Education

- **Parental leave.** So that more parents can spend the critical early months with their newborns, develop options (such as Unemployment Insurance) to finance paid leave for new parents.

- **Assure access to high-quality child care for infants and toddlers.** In 1998, 65% of California mothers were in the paid workforce. The quality of a child's care can substantially influence his cognitive and social development.

  - **Develop a state master plan** that outlines how all children eligible for state subsidized child care will gain access to high quality care within five years. Current evidence suggests that approximately 30% of families eligible for subsidies do not have access to such assistance due to under-funding.

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- Build on existing efforts to **improve staff retention and professional development** through higher compensation for staff who complete further education in the field and remain in their positions for a certain amount of time.

- **Allocate a cost of living adjustment to state subsidized child care centers** so that these centers can begin to make up for a 25% reduction in inflation-adjusted funding since 1981.

- **Promote the expansion of high-quality pre-school programs so that every three- and four-year-old has an opportunity to participate**, thus increasing the likelihood that all kindergarteners start school ready to learn. Use the work already done regarding pre-school expansion—by, for example, the 1998 Universal Preschool Task Force and forthcoming by the Legislative Master Plan for Education's School Readiness Task Force—to create a definitive implementation plan and timetable. Issues to be addressed would include recruitment and retention of qualified teaching staff, program standards, family involvement, facilities, financing and accountability.

Initial steps for 2002 might include:

- Addressing the workforce challenge by improving compensation linked to professional development and experience, and improving reimbursement to state subsidized child care centers (as noted in Recommendation #2);

- Closing the gap in available services by providing start-up funds to communities that are underserved by pre-school providers;

- **Dedicate resources to K-12 education in a way that more effectively closes the gap between low-performing and high-performing schools.**

- Given the research evidence that socioeconomic disadvantage is a highly influential factor in school achievement and that additional resources dedicated to lower-SES and minority students can make a substantial difference, school financing should be reviewed for its responsiveness to this evidence. The state's 2001-02 budget targets some funding to low-performing schools. Out of the total $45.5 billion Proposition 98 education budget, $200 million is targeted to schools with low API scores and $161 million for the Immediate Intervention/ Underperforming Schools Program.

- Continue to provide additional financial and other incentives for additional well-prepared and experienced teachers to teach and remain in schools serving disadvantaged students.

- The school reward system developed as a part of the new accountability focus should be assessed to assure that such rewards provide the intended encouragement for higher performance and are not inadvertently biased toward those schools that begin with fewer challenges.

- **Expand the supply of high-quality after school programs.** Build upon the modest expansion in the 2001-02 state budget to scale up the supply of after school programs such that all children ages 5 to 14 who need after school care have access to a high quality program; subsidized after school care is now available to fewer than half of the kids who could benefit from such care.

Family Economics

- **Enact a state Earned Income Credit (EIC)** for low-income working families. Fourteen states and the District of Columbia supplement the federal EIC with a state supplement to offer additional tax relief to low-income working families. A California EIC would benefit approximately two million working families with children.

- **Encourage schools to participate in the School Breakfast Program.** Less than 40% of children participating in the School Lunch Program receive a subsidized school breakfast as well. Start-up funds are available from the state.

- **Increase nutritious snacks and meals in after school and summer youth programs** by providing start-up funds to nonprofits and local government agencies, similar to the funds designated for schools, so that more can offer children needed snacks and meals.

- **Conduct more thorough outreach to families eligible for Food Stamps.** Almost two million eligible Californians are not receiving Food Stamps and many are unaware that as working families, they are eligible for this food assistance; state dollars designated for outreach would be matched by federal funds.

Health

- **Simplify eligible families' enrollment** into the subsidized health coverage programs Healthy Families and Medi-Cal:

  - Eliminate unnecessary paper documentation and remove the burdensome Medi-Cal assets test for parents.

  - Improve coordination between Healthy Families and Medi-Cal.

  - Promote implementation of Express Lane Eligibility options that maximize use of information families have provided for other public programs to speed their enrollment into health coverage.

  - Improve outreach to parents within their communities.

- **Help families maintain coverage** by monitoring retention in Healthy Families and Medi-Cal and addressing problems that interfere with continuity of care. Issues to address may include: application forms and procedures, required documentation, families' access to providers, communication between state and county agencies, state/county agencies' communication to families, and for Healthy Families, payment processing.

- **Strengthen the safety net** for children not eligible for Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. Bolster state and local efforts to provide health care and coverage.

- **Promote quality health care** by making quality information regarding children's health care services readily available to families. Also, establish a system to help families learn how to use such information so as to make the best health care choices for their children.

Safety

- **Help children be safe at home:**

  - **Invest in child abuse prevention services.** California's Office of Child Abuse Prevention's budget has barely kept pace with inflation throughout the 1990's, even as the number of reports has grown to over 660,000. Effective child abuse prevention programs pay off, not only in reduced child suffering, but also in avoided child welfare and other costs.

  - **Improve children's experience in foster care** by providing funding to address basic inadequacies in the foster care system, such as low reimbursement rates for family foster care homes and the large caseloads of child welfare workers. Help youth who have been in foster care transition to independence through better assistance with housing and college/career preparation.

- **After school programs not only can help boost children's academic achievement** (as noted under the Education recommendations) **but keep them safe in the after school hours.** Children are most likely to become victims of violent crime in the hours between 3 and 6 pm; after school programs provide safe havens for children.

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Community Action

Individuals, alone and with others, can make a tremendous difference in children's lives. Consider:

- Volunteering in a before or after school program to help kids with homework, organize a game or share a special skill you have.
- Sharing your time or resources with community programs that help families, such as health clinics, food banks or shelters.
- Making your company policies helpful to employees' ability to provide for and spend time with their children.
- Talking to your elected representatives about children's needs in your community.

Conclusion

For children to fulfill their potential, policymakers must recognize how profoundly factors outside of the school setting influence academic achievement. While some may see this fact as complicating the educational task, it poses an opportunity as well: educational outcomes can be improved not only by strengthening schools, but by addressing children's economic security, health and safety.

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